GUILFORD COUNTY

James MacLamroc, County Historian, Box 1558
GREENSBORO, N. C.

8 June 1978

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Gentlemen:

I am sending you herewith for your permanent files a copy of the Reverend Thomas J. Herin's brief history of the Bunker Hill United Methodist Church in southwest Guilford County, titled METHODISM COMES TO BUNKER HILL.

Recently Mr. Herin very kindly furnished me with copies and I take pleasure in sending you a copy at this time.

Cordially yours

County Historian

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METHODISM COMES TO BUNKER HILL

Methodist lay preachers labored in North Carolina as early as the 1760's, but the Methodist Episcopal Church in America was not formally organized until 1784. The early preachers traveled vast areas on horseback, preaching in homes and organizing "classes" of 10-12 people whose members prayed, sang, shared their religious experiences, and supported one another in Christian growth. Visits from the traveling preachers were infrequent at first and were eagerly awaited. The classes (many of which later grew into churches) were grouped on "circuits," which were in turn part of "districts." In 1788-1791, 20-30 preachers covered North and South Carolina, Virginia and Kentucky, and during these years they met in "Annual Conference" at the home of George McKnight, on what is now Tanglewood Park. Bishops Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke, the leaders of the American Methodists, attended these meetings.

Love's Methodist in Walkertown was organized by 1797, but the first known Methodist congregation in our immediate area was Sandy Ridge, which may have existed as early as the 1820's. A building was built on land given by Joel Chipman, and this structure was moved years later to its present location behind Buck and Roxie Idol's. According to Sandy Ridge records, Andrew and Elizabeth Lindsay, who owned vast amounts of land on both sides of Deep River, were charter members of the church. The Minutes of the Guilford Circuit of the Methodist Episcopal Church show that Andrew Lindsay was a Circuit Steward from April 6, 1833, until his death on November 2, 1844. After he married Lindsay's oldest daughter in 1834, Edmund W. Ogburn became a Steward as well. Sandy Ridge is shown in the Minutes to be a Methodist Episcopal church until the end of 1835, when it became a part of the Methodist Protestant connection, formed in 1828 to protest the nonrepresentation of the laity in Methodist policy-making. On March 25, 1836, the N. C. Annual Conference of Methodist Protestants was held at Sandy Ridge.

Apparently Sandy Ridge split over the Methodist Protestant issue and those like Andrew Lindsay who believed in the authority of bishops created a new church, ironically called Harmony Hill (apparently because of its location on that hill west of Deep River). Harmony Hill first appears in the Guilford Circuit minutes on December 5, 1835, and on July 9 of the following year, a committee including E. W. Ogburn was appointed "to superintend the building of a Church near E. W. Ogburn's in Guilford County." The Circuit's Quarterly Conference of Nov. 19, 1836, was held there, and on January 1, 1837, Ogburn deeded the church 2 acres of land on the north side of the Bunker Hill-Sandy Ridge Road, presumably near the site of Chip and Jane Leonard's home. Ogburn, Edmund Bowman, the Class leader, and Andrew Lindsay were among the trustees of the new church, and on March 25, 1837, Moses Brock, the Presiding Elder (District Superintendent) of the Greensboro District of the M. E. Church preached at Harmony Hill and stayed with the Lindsays. Elizabeth Lindsay writes that "great excitement" was occasioned at Harmony Hill the next March "when 21 or more professed to have religion," and Rev. Joshua Bethel (who was later President of Greensboro College) followed this up 2 weeks later with a "very good" two-day camp meeting at the cross roads. In 1840, Harmony Hill had

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44 in its Sunday School, and the church appears in the Circuit Minutes until 1852, at which time Ogburn was selling off his property in the area.

Meanwhile, in Kernersville, the Methodist Episcopal Church that was to become Main Street was organized in 1837. John Ross built their original building out of hand-hewn timbers, and Joshua Bethel was the first pastor. This congregation became part of the Stokes Circuit of the Salisbury District.

Bunker Hill Methodist Episcopal Church apparently grew out of a class meeting led by George Clampitt and was organized in the summer or fall of 1844. Clampitt and his three brothers had grown up in this area, had inherited the 466 acres granted by the State to their father Richard in 1787, and had purchased several hundred acres more from William Shields, Michael Idol, Anthony Wright, and others. Andrew Lindsay and his daughters attended the new church shortly before Lindsay's death on Nov. 2, and on Nov. 16, 1844, Bunker Hill appears in the Guilford Circuit Minutes for the first time. Addison Lea was the first pastor. On September 23, 1845, George Clampitt and Mary Eliza Lindsay (Andrew's daughter and the grandmother of Bowman Gray) deeded the church 2½ acres, on which the sanctuary and much of the cemetery now stand.

According to reliable tradition, the original building was of logs and was about 20 by 30 feet. The church was furnished with heavy plank benches, which had wooden pegs for legs and no backs. By 1851, Zadoc J. Stafford was a Class Leader as well as a Circuit Steward, and on June 14, 1856 (after the death of his father Robertson) Zadoc and his brothers gave the trustees of "the Methodist Episcopal Church, South" (since Methodism had now split again, this time over slavery) a half acre of land for use as a burying ground. In the years since, gifts of land from Jack and Bessie Watkins (1934) and from Homer and Ethel Idol (1963, 1973) have added nearly another acre to the church property.

In the mid 1800's, a brush arbor was built on the site of the present sanctuary and 2-3 day camp meetings were held. Audrey Phipps, who is our oldest member and who has lived nearby for over 87 years, recalls campers coming to her house across the road to use the family well.

After the Civil War, many churches in the area declined, and Bunker Hill was no exception. For a time there were only 3 members, and no regular preacher served the charge. In 1886, the Circuit Trustees surveyed the property and probably considered selling it. But in the mid 1890's several citizens of the community--some Methodists and some not--decided to build a new church, and a one-room white frame building was constructed in 1895. The reorganized congregation was placed on the Kernersville Circuit and had 15 persons on its roll. For 1896, Bunker Hill was assessed $10.00 of the preacher's $515.00 salary.

During the early years of this century, Bunker Hill struggled along, and few preachers on the Circuit stayed more than a year or two. Methodists and Primitive Baptists both used the building until the Baptist preacher found the door locked one Sunday morning and had to preach from a tree stump. Shortly thereafter, lightening struck a

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tree near the church and blew open the back door, but the Baptists built a building of their own across the road. Rev. H. C. Byrum put forth considerable effort between 1909 and 1912, and Victor R. Hedgecock, who joined Bunker Hill in 1906, tried to get a Sunday School going. But Hedgecock apparently became discouraged with the lack of response and transfered to the new and rapidly growing Sedge Garden.

Bunker Hill's membership never seemed to number more than 26, and by 1926, there were fewer persons on the roll than 30 years earlier; only a half dozen of these were active. John Davis recalled that in 1927 the building was in bad repair, there were no church officers or active young people, and there was still no Sunday School. The preacher came around on Sunday afternoon once a month. As a result, Bunker Hill was now given a decent burial. In November, 1927, the Annual Conference voted to "absorb" Bunker Hill into Sedge Garden and to put the property under the care of the Oak Ridge Quarterly Conference.

But out of death came new life. In 1929, Robert Phipps and others prevailed on Lee Stafford, who had grown up in this area but was then living near Sedge Garden, to come back to Bunker Hill and organize a Sunday School. Rev. H. C. Byrum, who was then pastoring Sedge Garden, gave strong encouragement. As a young man of 27, Lee brought fresh vitality to the scene and became a catalyst for renewed interest. He got the Sunday School going on May 19, 1929, and it has stayed going ever since. Byrum became pastor of Bunker Hill again in 1930 and served four years in that capacity. He was soon followed by Byron Nifong who left farming in his late 20's to finish high school and earn his A.B. from High Point College while pastoring this church for 6 years.

In 1934, the building was remodeled, 5 classrooms were added, and electricity was installed. Ben Phipps, who had played Bunker Hill's pump organ for several decades, found himself directing the choir from a new piano, and by 1942, there were 125 enrolled in Sunday School with an average attendance of 63 according to John Davis. By 1945, Bunker Hill was the largest church on a 4-point charge and boasted 144 full members.

The people of Bunker Hill began to dream "impossible" dreams and to see them become reality. In 1958, the congregation voted to build a new sanctuary and soon raised 240% of an initial $10,000 goal. In 1960, after a service of appreciation in the 1895 frame church, the people marched triumphantly into a new sanctuary, which by 1965 was debt-free. The Sunday School building was added in 1969 and dedicated in 1975 in the same conference year that Bunker Hill assumed the support of its first full-time pastor. In recent years, there has been steady growth, not only in membership and budget, but also in programing, community involvement, mission support, and deepening commitment to Christ and His Kingdom.

Tom Herin
May 21, 1978

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